

Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.

gretchen #3

***the blood
issue***

[what]

For #3 I decided to include a special theme section. While this is being coined *the blood issue* I'm not only including pieces on blood related topics, but rather a collection of items about things that can cause a person pain, physical or emotional. Why not call it the "pain issue" then? Because I didn't want to, that's why. Lately I've had a strange fascination with things that are bloody or even blood red. I feel as though I should warn you, the flow this issue will be heavy so if you're a little squeamish about reading about period-related issues this might be a little uncomfortable.

Some of the contents of this publication may be triggering to those with tendencies towards self-injury. Read at your own risk.

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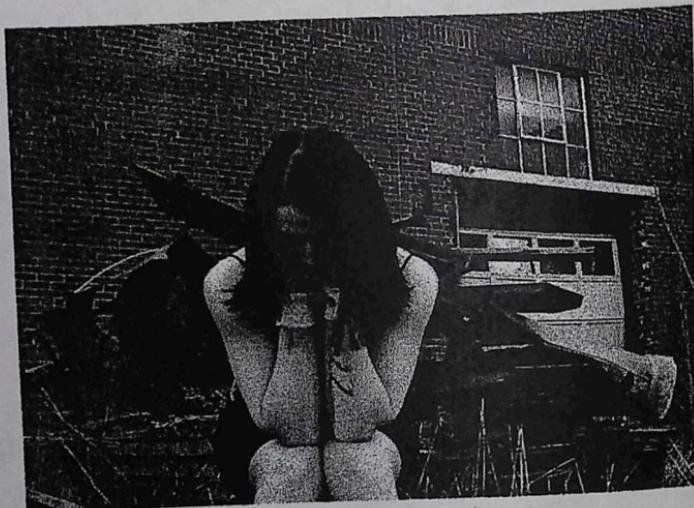
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The quote on the cover is from Sylvia Plath's poem
The Munich Mannequins.

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& to Jeff Wells for the sad cowboy drawing.

mental notes

There used to be a time when people would ask me how I was doing & I'd have to pause for a moment because I wasn't sure if they were asking out of politeness or if they really wanted to know how I was. If the truth were to be told I would've said that I seemed to be functioning just fine from outward appearances but inside I was broken. Broken because I was held hostage by fear & panic of the unknown & sometimes of the known. Unsure of where I stood with people in my life & going through the motions of being happy for having settled in certain circumstances.

But now if someone asked me how I was doing, I would smile & say, "I'm good," and it would be the truth. I mean I still have some problems but for the most part I'm able to shake them off before I get to the point of anxiety about them. The future really doesn't scare me anymore.

One thing right now that's kind of causing me problems is my medication. Or at least I believe it's my medication. And that problem isn't even a major one. I'm just extremely sleepy at certain points in the day, like the early afternoon & then later on around 10 at night. I'm sure I should be in bed by 10 when I have to get up for work anyway, but we don't always do what we should do, especially when the alternative is so appealing.

So I'm going to wait until school is out for the summer when I can sleep more & see if my fatigue is stemming from the medication or my irregular sleeping habits.

One thing that's caused me stress that's no one's fault but my own is finances. I've done the retail therapy thing way too much since the last column. I'm trying to get a job with my school division teaching in the jail program. It pays well & only requires 8 hours a week. And that money will be better than no extra money.

I wear a biteplate in my mouth at night to keep me from grinding my teeth together in my sleep. Well I'm supposed to be wearing it, I haven't in over a month. It's a shame that stress follows me into my sleep. But anyway, this week I had extreme jaw pain on the right side. I don't remember being hit in the face or falling on that side or anything so evidently I must be grinding my teeth together more lately. I went to the dentist about it today & the hygienist noticed that my gums are receded more than they should be for someone my age. It's not something that could be noticed except by someone looking really closely under my teeth & unless you're a dental professional or my boyfriend you have no business looking there. So she asked me if I'd ever had an eating disorder, theorizing that perhaps the acid from throwing up if I'd had bulimia could've caused it. I told her that long ago I'd had anorexia but I can't see how that would affect me now. Of course I'm no expert. When the dentist came in he noticed the same thing & asked me about my diet. "Do you have a pretty well-balanced diet?" I thought about what my eating habits were lately, mostly noodles and sauce & replied, "No." So he suggested that I take a vitamin every day since I don't eat so healthy. Somehow it always comes back to food...weight...

But now if someone asked me how I was doing, I would smile & say, "I'm good."

[Et cetera]

the good: lolita (the style of clothing not the work by Nabukov), DIY clothing, colored hair extensions, the sun (thank goodness winter is over), graffiti art, astro pops, summer vacation

the bad: credit card debt, humidity, end-of-the-year paperwork, self-doubt

the ugly: my frizzy hair (frizz ease really works!), this tickbite, near blowout in my earlobes from stretching too quickly (thanks, silicone plugs)

Reading: michio kaku & kurt vonnegut

Listening to: fugazi, l7, til tuesday, the locust, postal service, the drama queens, the cure, blah blah blah

By the way, the drama queens have a new cd, I think you should check it out because it's badass. Email me for more information. I'd go ahead & print an email address but I don't have it burned into my brain yet.

Since the last issue:

- I have a new boyfriend & I'm very happy.
- I went to a burlesque rock show in Richmond, VA at which the above mentioned drama queens & the voxals (thevoxals.tk) played. The only parts of the show that I caught were the music performances, but really the music was my reason for being there to begin with. I have to say that even though the venue had no air conditioning (it was a bar, who would've known?) I still had a great time. I only missed the burlesque show because I left my place in the front to go for water & upon return I'd lost my place to really tall people. One of my ex's that lives in that town came & it was a good thing because I felt absolutely nothing when I saw him. Not even the anger that I had months ago from being lied to. It was almost as though the relationship had never happened & he was just a friend like he'd been before. My inability to hold a grudge sometimes shocks me.
- I have yet to open my sewing machine & play dr. frankenstein with clothing. I'm not sure it's fear or laziness that has kept me from being productive. Probably both.
- I decided to teach with the school system's jail program as sort of a second job.
- Have been sickened by the cycle of violence that is going on in this world.
- I went to my first theme party: superheros. I was boy scout girl & sadly I didn't take a photo of my whole get-up.
- I revealed my identity as the vannapper of the A-Team Van that lives at the Drama Queen's' house when I returned it to its rightful owners after a few weeks of sending polaroids & ransom letters through the mail. Muahaha.
- Stuff & things...

3

June 22: Happy Birthday Scott!

DEATH

This morning I checked my online journal friends list & learned that someone from a different online community that I frequent had passed away. He was someone that I had never spoken to directly but I'd gone to his journal page on occasion. Morbid curiosity took me back there this morning. It's surreal to look at a photo of someone & read things they'd written when they were living. I wondered if they knew they were dying. Over the years I've been on iam I've heard of several people who have died, some were ill & some had died in accidents. Either way it's a tragedy, but to read someone write about their plans for the next day & then know that death came in between the moment they clicked, "update" & the execution of those plans...it makes you think. I could be writing this now & before the issue is released I could die. It's not something I like to think about & I really hope that it doesn't happen but it very well could.

The first dead person I remember seeing was a great-uncle. He was very old & I didn't know him so there was no sadness, just looking at the body in the casket thinking, "he's dead." I was a child then & had a vague understanding of what death was. When I was 3 my father's brother, someone who had doted on me greatly, was killed in a car accident. I remember once my grandmother telling me we were "going to see Ellis" & I looked at the sky thinking we were going to Heaven. Only we were really walking up the road to his grave. Incidentally his grave was moved a few years after that to a place in the front yard to the right of my grandmother's house. I don't think my grandparents ever stopped mourning.

The first person I lost who was close to me was my friend Kim. Kim was my best friend who found a lump inside her mouth in the sixth grade. I had moved to another school when she learned that it was cancer & that it was spreading. I didn't see Kim much during her treatment, which was sad for me because we lost touch. It may've been better for me that way, as if we had remained as close as we'd been prior to me moving her death would've been much harder on me than it was. I was unable to attend her funeral because my mother didn't tell me about it, something that angered me for a long time. But I don't know what Kim looked like in death, only in life...and not the chemotherapy-ridden life either.

Of all the relatives & peers that have passed the death of my maternal grandmother in 1995 was the hardest to deal with. I was born when my mother was still in high school so I spent a great deal of time with Granny (laugh if you will but that's her name to me) as a child. Even after my mom graduated we still visited a lot. She was my first pen pal. We had tea parties, played pretend Cinderella, & all sorts of girly things. She was such a sweet lady, but she still had a devious playful side. It was a beautiful thing. Not so beautiful though was the fact that she suffered physically the whole time I remember her. She had a plethora of medical problems that mostly confined her to the sofa in the living room during the days. That's why we played Cinderella & had tea parties-those were games that didn't involve much moving on her part. I don't think I ever remember her raising her voice at me. I don't think I ever misbehaved around her. It was like I knew as a child that she was fragile & I needed to help take care of her anyway I could. Granny was the only person I ever remember hugging me as a child. And I mean the only person.

She was in & out of the hospital for years, one thing after another it seemed. But the key word is *out*. It was like no matter how much her body fought against her she always won, she always made it home again. In 1994, at some point after Christmas though she went into the hospital. Details are fuzzy now but I believe that her nurse dropped her in the shower & because of her weight she couldn't get her up. She went to the hospital that day in an ambulance & then to ICU. I don't remember much about the next couple of weeks except that she was unconscious mostly.

Every now & then I'd get a call from my mom at work telling me I needed to come to the hospital out of fear that Granny wasn't going to make it through the night. It never occurred to me that my mom might be right because Granny *never* died. I'd leave the restaurant anyway & go to her room. I remember one night going into her room after a call with my then boyfriend Steve. It was around 11 at night & I was wearing a white shirt & black pants, my uniform. She was on a respirator & her eyes were closed. My mom said to her, "Jennifer's here," and she showed some movement. Her eyes opened up halfway. They looked yellow & lifeless but I remember that a tear came out of the corner of one of them. I started crying & Steve said he almost started crying at the sight of the two of us.

It had become my routine when going to the ICU to walk directly to her room & not look around for family members or going to the desk. I know one time I walked in & her room was empty but she'd been moved. That was scary.

One Saturday morning I went to the hospital like always. I was wearing green pants & a green flannel-esque shirt. It's odd the details you remember about things. I got off the elevator & looked in the waiting area but didn't see anyone from my family. So I walked down the salmon-colored corridor towards the snack area...no one. I think I walked a complete circle around that floor & then left the hospital. I don't know what kept me from going to her room. I'd like to think it was her though.

When I walked inside my house my mom was waiting for me at the door. She informed me that "Granny has gone home to be with the Lord." I told her that I'd just been to the hospital. I think that scared her because she asked what I'd seen. Nothing. My response was, "I have to have new shoes for the funeral." I was completely broken & my only way to avoid showing emotion, because I'd never really cried in front of my mom except during punishment, was to think about something else. And in this case it happened to be shoes. I left right after calling my step-mom & bought a new pair of shoes. I just needed to get out of the house.

I held it together until I went to the funeral home. My mom wanted me to kiss her but all I could do was touch her stomach. I remember that when she was alive she always had a protruding place on her stomach, a hernia I suppose. The spot I touched was hard, but I don't know if it was the hernia or just the way a dead body feels.

I don't think I handled her death very well looking back on it. I became almost emotionless towards other people, pushing them away because I didn't want to get close to anyone. What's the point when sooner or later they would leave me either through death or just going away? My boyfriend & I ended up breaking up because I kept pushing him away & that led to other problems. He told me once "she's dead, get over it" & I think that was really the beginning of the end. I was 18 at the time & soon replaced him with someone who'd shown me a little bit of kindness during the ordeal.

Recently the big news story has been the beheading of the American Nick Berg aired on Islamist web site. I almost watched the clip several days ago but stopped myself. I don't want that image burned into my brain the way images of people jumping to their deaths from the WTC towers are. Knowing my morbid curiosity I may end up viewing it sooner or later. Part of what's so haunting for me is that seeing people in death is a reminder of my own mortality. One day I'm going to die & I wonder if it will be something that I can see coming or if death will surprise me. What do people really think about when they know they're dying? What does it feel like the moment your life ends? Sometimes I wonder if there's something wrong with my feelings that it might be better if death is like a big black hole where you don't dream or have an afterlife, you just die. Or that the energy from our souls just dissipates back into the atmosphere, no answering for things we did when we were alive, no angels, no demons, no nothing.

Like a light bulb that blows out.

Eggs

I do love eggs. From my head down to my legs you might say. But really only scrambled eggs or omelettes & I have to have lots of cheese in them. Add some tomatoes, green peppers, & hot sauce & you're cooking with grease.

My focus here is not to talk about eggs of the breakfast variety though.

Once when I was thinking of ways to make some extra money I thought about things I could sell. Upon discussing it with friends one day someone mentioned selling eggs. This seemed like a great idea. I have them & goodness knows I won't be using them anytime soon so this could be the answer I was looking for. So I started doing research & talking to people as to what they'd heard about the procedure. I don't know if it was me or what but it was extremely difficult to find any actual information about the legal issues involved with egg donation. My primary concern with the legal aspect would be the child or children that would eventually come from my eggs being able to find me. That's something that I wouldn't want to happen for reasons that are probably obvious. Then again other information says that a donor releases all rights to their eggs & that donation can be anonymous. I'm not too sure how anonymous one can be after leaving a paper trail from medical evaluations and hormone injections and various other procedures though. With laws changing so much these days you can't be too sure. [Paranoid much?]

So as not to sound totally money-driven here I wouldn't be donating solely based on the monetary factor. Growing up I had an aunt who couldn't have children & I saw first-hand how devastating this was to her & her husband, it was probably one of the factors that led to their divorce. Not being in a position where I've ever tried to have children I don't know if I would go the route of in vitro fertilization or adoption. Some people would argue that there are so many parentless children in the world that it's selfish to choose surrogacy or IVF over adoption but I think that sometimes people want their actual bloodline to be carried on & that's a very important thing to them for one reason or another. See, it wouldn't be a totally selfish venture.

Of course there are medical issues, such as the risks associated with the procedure. Some are fairly serious & include hemorrhaging & increased risk of ovarian cancer.* Donors also have to answer extensive medical history questions. And this is one reason why I never even completed the first step in the process. I have asthma & a family history of diabetes, cancer, mental illness, & the list goes on & on. Most likely I'd be rejected because of the risk of passing on a predisposition to one or more illnesses & that's totally understandable.

So no egg donation for me.

*www.barnard.Columbia.edu/health

FIRSTS

- I believe my first memory ever is looking out the window at the moon one night while my mom told me that my bottles & pacifiers had been sent to the moon. I have no idea how old I was.
- My first day of school wasn't a whole day. Apparently the school year had already started because the other children were already there. School seemed like such a big place but I don't remember being scared that day. The memory is faded but I think all the kids gathered around me & somehow I went home with a kite made of paper. Even though I wasn't frightened on that particular day school would prove to be a constant source of anxiety for me over the next years due to pressure to succeed.
- I got my first non-surgery related stitches taking ice skating lessons, I was younger than 9 then but my exact age I'm not sure of. I wish I could say that I was doing some sort of highly technical move when I fell, but in reality I was bending over to tie my laces, fell on the ice, and busted my chin open. At the hospital the nurses made me a turkey from a latex glove which I thought was the neatest thing ever. The little boy that was in the car with us didn't want to sit next to me because I had stitches, I guess that made me contagious or something, & I remember crying about

that. That would be the first time I ever cried over a boy.

- My first "boyfriend" was a kid in kindergarten named Jason. We used to play house in the reading castle until the teacher figured out we weren't reading but cooking pretend turkeys.
- Simon le Bon was my first crush.
- My first step-father was a bastard.
- The first time I got my mouth washed out with soap was for saying the word, "fart." Someone told the day care worker that I'd said a bad word that started with an "f." My mother thought I said, "fuck." heh.
- My first real kiss with a boy was in the seventh grade under the stairs with Jayson.
- The first time I flew was March 2003 when I went to Rhode Island.
- My first planned major in college was dental hygiene.
- My first job was at a bbq place called Short Sugar's.
- The first prom dress I wore was purple & white & very sequiny.
- My first tattoo was a small butterfly on my right thigh. I still have it, but I am going to cover it up since I am more into larger pieces now.
- Being a social worker was my first job out of college.

friendshit

I've always had more male friends than female friends. I'm not sure why, I just got along better with boys. I don't want to think that it was out of competition but as I look back on my girl friends (most of them but certainly not all) in high school I remember many times being told, "my boyfriend's here so don't talk to him..." or "you've already got a boyfriend so don't go after [insert boy's name here.] In reality I had no intentions of talking to that friend's boyfriend & I couldn't help it that most of the guys my girlfriends had crushes on were in my little circle of nerdy guy friends. It wasn't like I was some predatory female either, I had the worst self-esteem of anyone I knew & didn't go from guy to guy to guy. And there was always the trust issue that stemmed from these volatile female friendships. Jealousy would come in somewhere & suddenly my secrets were out. When I confided in one of the guys that never happened.

Female/female friendships weren't what I was thinking about when I decided to write this though. My inspiration came from the problem that I'm seeing now with female/male friendships, not really with myself but with other people. I'm not sure where the idea or implication that men & women can't be friends without having sex with each other came from but it's totally ridiculous. There have been many occasions when a relationship formed from a friendship with someone, but I've also personally had purely platonic relations with guys & never felt the need to pursue something more.

Of course according to the ladder theory this would be due to the fact that no man can be friends with a female they find attractive without wanting to sleep with them. Not being a male I can't speak to this, maybe some of you guys who are reading can send me an email or letter explaining your feelings on the matter.

But I digress...

When a girl & a guy leave a social situation together it does not mean that they are going to have sex. I can't tell you how frustrating it is to find out that my male friends think that because I went to the store or for a drive with someone that we really went out to fuck around. If those were the reasons for leaving then fine, think what you want. But most of the time sex isn't even an issue. I just wanted to hang out with someone.

When a girl begins a sexual relationship with one guy friend it does not mean she wants to be banged by all of her guy friends. Now there have been occasions where I've hung out with guys & was attracted to more than one of my friends, but I would never carry on simultaneous relationships of any sort, sexual or romantic. That's just not my style. Probably because I can't "just" have sex with someone. The sexual & romantic aspects are entwined. So please don't make assumptions like that about girls you know, fellas. It's only going to piss your girl friend off if you start trying to put the moves on her based on the fact that she is sleeping with one of your mutual friends. If you're going that route at least base it on something else.

Believe it or not, some girls just want to be friends. Don't take this personally because it may have nothing at all to do with you or how you look or dress or anything else. Relationships just aren't for everyone. I know this because I've been involved with males who weren't ready for a serious involvement. And I'm pretty damned awesome so it couldn't have been me.

Hook-ups are okay with some people as long as it's a mutual thing. Charlie Brown said it best, "nothing spoils the taste of peanut butter like unrequited love." Of course love might not be an issue here, but sometimes when friends start having physical relationships it's not clear what's supposed to be going on & that creates confusion, especially if one person has feelings & the other one doesn't, but doesn't really say that until after the fact. Um, I'm not even sure if this one belongs in this article, but I really like that peanut butter quote. I just hate to see good friendships go bad over a little nudge-nudge-wink-wink-say no more.

I feel like I should add that none of this is meant as a blow to anyone that I know personally, it's based on observations that I've made from years & years of hanging out with males & I'm not sure why the same themes keep reoccurring. Perhaps it's because they don't know how females think. And I can't speak for all of us, but this is how I feel at least.

<3

[relationshit, or a lack thereof]

"The one you love & the one who loves you are never, ever the same person."

[Chuck Palahniuk]

I used to believe that quote held a great amount of truth.

I no longer believe that.

10

adventures in cps

Thanks to an internship at social services during college I was able to get a job there right after graduation in the child protective services unit. Basically I was responsible for investigating child abuse & neglect complaints, providing services, drug testing folks in their homes, taking kids from their parents when my supervisor told me to, & going to court among a plethora of other things. I wanted to do this because I wanted to help families who were going through things I'd gone through & worse. I guess coming out of college I was starry-eyed & hoping to change the world. I quickly became jaded though.

By the time November 2, 2000 rolled around I had been working long enough to qualify for flex time, which meant I worked four ten hour days & had one day off. I was one of the first people to arrive in the office every morning at 7:30. So that morning when I got there the on-call worker from the night before, Linda, told me she'd taken a CPS complaint early that morning that I needed to start on. I had to do it because I was the first CPS worker there. Actually she should've started on it but Linda worked in adult services & was pretty much an airhead so I expected her to just wait & pounce on the first one of us she saw. Turns out it wasn't an ordinary case, it was a dead baby call turned in by the detectives. In the time I'd worked there, which was well over a year, I had been fortunate enough that any child fatality cases that came in were really just SIDS & not abuse. I know it sounds odd to say that, but if the child died it's best that it be from natural causes & not at the parents' hands.

The idea of working on this case made me extremely nervous for many reasons. I knew it would be emotionally trying & child fatality cases always involved the main office which would mean an increased amount of supervising on all levels.

I waited for my friend & co-worker Wendy to get to the office. This was Wendy's second day & she was mostly riding around with other workers observing. I figured this would be a good way to learn. That & I didn't want to work that case alone.

We head over to the police department across the street where I learn a little more about the case. The deceased is an 8 month old named Ry. (That's his name shortened for purposes of anonymity.) He had marks on his body. At this point that's all they could tell me. My first order of business was to take his full sister who's name I can't recall right now to a foster home. She was about two years old & when I picked her up it seemed like she had no energy or muscle tone at all.

My next job was to go to the morgue at the hospital with a very old Polaroid camera & attempt to take photos of Ry. One of my supervisors told me to do this but none of us was sure that the hospital would let us in. When we arrived we had to go through several different ID checks after which Wendy & I were led upstairs to a room marked, "gross anatomy." Inside the morgue was pretty much like the smaller morgues you see on television. Mostly stainless steel tools & counters & one stainless steel autopsy table in the center of the room. Everything was clean, thank goodness. I stood there looking at the various instruments of cutting bones & other body parts in the cabinet trying hard not to be nervous. While waiting a doctor came in

holding an organ of some sort in his hands to weigh. He dripped a little blood on the floor which I made a note of so as not to step in it on the way out.

Finally a blond-haired technician in a white lab coat came in, went to the fridge, & came out holding Ry wrapped in a white blanket just as if he were living. Only when she laid him down on the table it was obvious that he was not living.

If you've never looked into the eyes of someone dead you can't imagine the way it feels. It's the definition of vacancy. Expressionless, blank, it's not even something that I can put into words appropriately but trust me once you've seen dead eyes you will never forget them. Ry weighed a little over 11 lbs. which is close to what some babies are born weighing, not what you'd expect from an 8 month old. He was thin & had no muscle tone, just skin hanging off bones. The frenulum in his mouth was torn, probably from being popped in the mouth for crying. He had bruises on various parts of his body as well. She turned him over & his blood had started pooling, that's how she explained the way his bottom looked.

I took a few photos & then we left in almost near silence. I'm not sure how I maintained an appetite at that point but we went & had chicken sandwiches after that trip. I also bought a new Rage Against the Machine cd while at the mall. I think I was trying not to think about what I was dealing with. But it did catch up with me about an hour later when I locked my office door & just sat there shaking. I still had no details as to what or who killed Ry but I knew it wasn't illness. How could someone have done such a thing?

My attempt to sit alone & have a panic attack was interrupted by two detectives who came in to discuss the case with me. They asked me if I wanted to go to the autopsy the next day in Roanoke. I said, "no" because of the way I was feeling at the time but looking back I probably should've gone for the learning experience.

Needless to say that night I just felt sick about humanity & felt extremely bad for the children involved. I failed to mention that earlier in the day I spoke with Ry's maternal grandmother. No one had seen Ry in a few months. They'd seen his sister, who I'll call Mia, but not him. The last time they'd seen him was over the summer when he had a cast on his arm from "falling." I don't know why his absence didn't raise any flags.

I went to court that afternoon where the detective told me I'd done a good job with the pictures. Actually he said, "good girl." Sheesh. Then the judge made a comment insinuating that I was pregnant, but really I was just wearing a baggy shirt. I never wore that shirt again though. The details of that whole day are just as clear as they were all those years ago.

The next morning I went to the apartment shared by Ry's parents, Ry's father's other girlfriend & the child that they shared. There were bottles in the fridge but only labeled for the other girlfriend's daughter. Ry's had already been taken for evidence. I was careful not to touch anything in the apartment because I didn't want to taint any possible evidence. The place was fairly clean, cleaner than most homes I went into. Ry's bed had been cut where police had taken part of it to examine further. I think there was blood on it.

The second day also involved going to talk to Ry's father (Jon*)'s other girlfriend who was staying at her mother's trailer. At this point no arrests had been made so everyone involved was still free. I had to inform the girlfriend that she was to keep her baby away from Jonathon or that child would end up in foster care as well for her safety. Jon refused to talk to me so I never really heard his side of the story.

According to neighbors Ry's mother Lashonda* came to their door at the housing project the night of his death asking for help because the baby wasn't breathing. The neighbor said that when that happened she could tell he was already gone. The surprising thing was that the next door neighbor had no idea that there was even a baby boy in the apartment.

The results of the autopsy showed that Ry had died from a blunt force trauma to the head. But he had 13 broken & healed ribs also. It was looking like he'd been abuse probably the entire 8 months of his existence. Still, no one would talk about the night he died.

I was able to found a case of abuse against both parents at that point. "Found" means more likely than not abuse had occurred. CPS is governed in Virginia by civil law which means "founded" or "unfounded" rather than "guilty" or "not guilty." So after that I knew I'd have to go to court later on to testify against the mother in J&DR court but other than that my part in the case was almost over. I still needed to try to talk to Jon before he was arrested. And we were all pretty sure he was going to be arrested soon. So Wendy & I would drive by the apartment & never catch him. Pretty soon we would just drive through the parking lot at the projects & keep going.

Then the morning after the last time I decided to drive through the lot Jon was found hanging in the back closet by a maintenance man. I heard that he'd been there for a few days because flies were all around as well as other creepy crawlies. From my tour of the apartment I could imagine what he looked like hanging there from the large water pipe that went through the ceiling of the back bedroom.

Later on Ry's mother was charged with something & found guilty, what I'm not sure but her sentence was only five years in jail & five years of probation. She got off pretty lightly for someone who let their baby's daddy abuse him & then kill him. Sometimes I think it might be interesting to find her & try to talk to her about what had happened. Chances are that if I found her then she wouldn't talk to me. She was very mild-mannered & passive back then. Jail may've toughened her up a bit. Or wore her down more.

I never found out what really happened that night that Ry died & I probably never will. Mia was later adopted by an aunt & uncle & what became of the other child I'm not sure. She's probably still with her mother. This might sound a little insensitive but the world is better off for Jon having taken his own life. I don't really believe most prisons are places of rehabilitation & I'm not even sure that someone who could harm an innocent baby like that is capable of rehabilitation. I suppose some people would say that if he were allowed to live & jailed then he'd have to live knowing what he'd done every day & that that would be a greater punishment than death. But Jon would still get to see the sun sometimes & have his family visit. He could still read & watch television. I'm not saying jail would be a picnic but think about the baby who will never speak his first word or take his first steps. The other children born the year he was

born going to their first day of school who will never know him. An empty seat on the school bus where he should be sitting every morning on the way to school. All of those potential experiences for that one life wiped out with one bang on the head on a floor or who knows what else. I don't think Jon deserved to breathe. I hope Ry's last breath echoed through his mind over & over until he choked from the rope around his neck.

*Names have been changed.



loud wrappers...

A few months ago I was sitting in a room with a group of guys when a feminine hygiene ad came on television. I saw the little red dot that's synonymous with a particular company & wasn't paying attention that closely but gathered that they were now selling pads with quiet wrappers. Immediately to follow the commercial were jokes about the absurdity of the product, I mean how many times does the average male hear a girl unwrapping a pad & it becomes an issue? Does it even matter? Chances are this was created by someone who has a hard time using a public women's restroom during "that time of the month" because other women can hear the wrapper & then they know that she is on her period. Oh, the horror!!! We're all women & we all bleed. It's a part of life, in this day & age when so many other things that once were unmentionable are now topics of daily conversation (how many times did you hear "oral sex" during the Clinton/Lewinsky bullshit a few years ago) people are still trying to act like menstruation is but a fairy tale, or something that should be kept under wrappers, I mean wraps.

I myself am guilty of having anxiety about purchasing tampons or panty liners for the simple fact that growing up I was made to feel that your period was something that you didn't talk about, as if it was dirty. My mom never used the words, "tampon" or "pad" specifically. When I changed them at school I did prefer to go into the bathroom alone. I started before most girls in my classes & I didn't want to be bothered with lots of questions from my peers or have the whole class know my personal business because kids that age do talk you know.

This fear carried over into adulthood & I will admit that sometimes when I buy those items I put them in the back of the cart so that no one sees them. Lately I've started to care less, because just like I said earlier, it's a part of life & people know this so there's no sense hiding it. I think a lot of things I used to hide from I don't anymore.

It just seems like another marketing scheme that buys into the whole idea of women's body issues are something that needs to be concealed from the world. It's not that I want to run around announcing to the world every four weeks, "HEY OUT THERE, I'M ON THE RAG! YAY!" I do feel as though it's going to make people think, whether consciously or not, "*Well they're making quiet wrappers so that no one will hear you changing your pad. This must mean that it's a bad thing for anyone to know what you're doing in the bathroom stall.*"

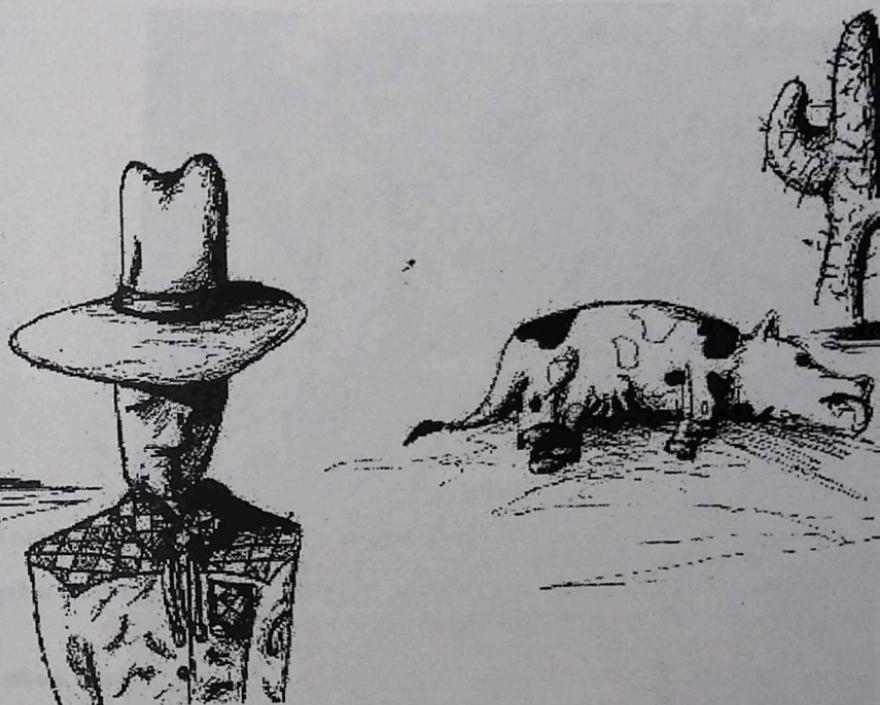
Of course this new quiet "pouch" isn't the only example of marketing that feeds into the river of menstruation secrecy, since these types of products have been advertised slogans have hinted that menses is something naughty, taboo to discuss in mixed company, & should be loathed & hidden by women. For example in 1949 *Good Housekeeping* ran an ad that read, "You don't know you're wearing one-and neither does anyone else (Houppert, 14). Decades later, in 1994 times haven't changed much as far as selling tampons or pads because the following text appeared in an ad in *Seventeen*, "...you're free to wear anything, go anywhere. And no one will ever know you've got your period" (Lee, 59).

I don't know, it just seems like a waste of money to me to spend extra for cloth-like wrappers. I've never touched them personally but I've heard them described as being made of the same material as shop cloths. I guess if nothing else you could possibly dust with them instead of throwing them away.

Works cited

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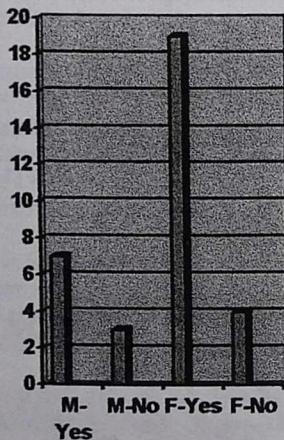
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Drawing by Jeff Wells, Danville, VA

.sex

Before I go into how I personally feel on the subject of period sex I wanted to mention a poll I took over livejournal a few months ago about the very issue. Twenty-two females & eleven males took the poll although some people didn't answer certain questions. That explains why some of the statistics are a little off. I decided to do a little graph to "blind you with statistical fury" as Eric would say in regards to the question, "In general, would you have sex while you or your partner was having a visit from Aunt Flow?" As you can see most of the people answering said that they would. Altogether there were 26 yes & 7 no responses. I think I was expecting more votes towards "no," especially from the males but I wasn't surprised that most females said that they would have sex during their period. I also asked for some of the reasons for peoples' decisions.



Yes responses included (& I'm denoting male answers with an "m"): *i'm usually horny when i have my period, expediency, i don't prefer it (m), not squeamish about bodily fluids (m), orgasms feel even better, why not? it's no problem in the shower (m), sex while she is visiting makes her stay shorter, & I do, but always wear a condom... cleanup is easy (m).*

Among the comments from people who said, "no" were: *i did it once, and she flowed like the mighty miss (m), & I've done it before...nothing special about it. (m).*

Like many people that I asked the decision of whether or not to "have relations" (haha) during that time of the month depends on factors like how heavy the flow is or how bad the cramps are. I'm not grossed out by the blood, but if I'm bleeding really heavily then I don't really want to leave the sheets looking like there's been a bloodbath. Of course if it's someone that I've been with for awhile then the bloodbath issue isn't going to be that important as time goes on. But for the most part I don't want to have to deal with the clean up & changing of the sheets

several times a week. I'm just lazy. Of course getting back to the issue of cramps, sometimes I feel so badly I can barely move let alone function in a bedroom sort of capacity. So I suppose that with many things there really isn't a simple yes or no, unless you're dead set against the idea of having sex. I've heard some males, just through random discussion say that there was no way that they'd have sex with a girl who was on her period because it was "gross." I suppose that the idea of sticking your penis into a bloody vagina might be a little foreign to someone who has never done it before, but in all honesty I've never had a boyfriend who wouldn't do it so I don't have any in-depth perception as far as guys who absolutely won't do it. I suppose it's just a personal preference. I agree with some of the girls who took my survey in that I'm usually more in the mood during that time so it'd be kind of a let-down for me to have to resort to b.o.b. (battery operated boyfriend) during my period if I had a boyfriend or partner who was against it.

image courtesy of worldwidewetns.net



This is for Beatrix, Who Bled Too Much [fiction]

Summer is around the corner. Soon it will be time to shed the jackets & the long pants in favor of tank tops and shorts. I am not looking forward to that one bit. You see, as long as I can wear long sleeves I can cover up my scars.

I could lift up my sleeves right now & what you would see would be a gauze bandage on my forearm stained with a little line of blood. You would also see cuts in various forms of healing, some scabs, some still slightly open and oozing out droplets of blood with the slightest bit of agitation from movement. If you look very closely at my alabaster skin you can see faint scars of past cuts. I normally don't describe my skin as "alabaster" but somehow picturing the redness of the blood against something so pale is quite poetic in a tragic sort of way. The whole idea is sort of grotesque, almost like some sort of odd human experiment. Only I did this to myself.

I'm twenty-two & I've been doing this off & on for about nine years. During this time I had bulimia, which landed me in a hospital for about six months in high school. Am I better? Well I don't puke now after I eat, but if you ask me if I'm better I'd honestly have to say, "no."

I believe the manifestations of my "issues" began long ago when my mother died. I was thirteen at the time & walked in as I was getting ready to leave for school to find her lifeless body lying in the bed. She'd had cancer but was going through chemotherapy at the time so she'd been sick for days on end. I know she always hated the treatment but the doctors kept telling her it was the only chance she had to live...for an extra year or two at the most. My mother didn't die from the cancer; she died from the overdose of pain medication & alcohol that she kept in her bedroom. She killed herself because the treatment was worse than the disease. She felt hopeless as well. She knew she would probably be dead by the time her daughter graduated from high school; she'd never know her own grandchildren or go to work again. She could barely even move it was so painful those last few days. While I was shocked that she took her own life, I sort of understood it even though I think it was a selfish thing to do.

I didn't handle her death very well. I was extremely angry at everything & everyone even though it was no one's fault. I lost my faith in God, not that I'd been deeply religious before but now I'd totally decided that there wasn't any higher power looking out for anyone. I remember taking a bath one night while shaving my legs & I began to cry. I can only explain the feeling as extreme sadness mixed with frustration & anger. I was so angry, imagine the most mad

you've ever felt & combine that with the deepest loss you've ever felt. My mother was gone & there was nothing I could do about it. I didn't even get to say "goodbye."

My eyes must've been too filled with tears to function properly because I ended up cutting myself with the razor accidentally. It was a pretty superficial cut but it bled quite a bit. I watched the blood flow from the wound and roll down my calf until it blended in with the clear bathwater, like a red waterfall emptying into a pristine lake. It was beautiful. And with the release of the blood from my veins I felt a release of frustration & anger. Like all the pain had ran down my leg into the water & would soon go down the drain like bubble bath.

I was fine for the rest of that night, for the most part. Two days later I bought a pack of straight razors & put them in my medicine cabinet, which had become my arsenal of laxatives & soon would house a host of sharp objects. The night I bought the blades I found myself alone in the bathroom cutting a tiny gash in my arm, watching the blood pour into the sink. Once again, I felt the release of all those negative emotions going along with it.

I soon started cutting almost daily & not just with razors. I'd use kitchen knives & sometimes even a sharp fingernail if I didn't have access to anything steel that could do the trick. I started scabbing up, which was interesting for me because I soon found that if I picked at the scabs I could reuse a cut over and over.

I secretly was disgusted with myself. I was scarring my arms & sometimes my thighs by cutting myself, but really that was the only thing that seemed to help. Talking to friends & counselors did nothing for me. Trying to find hobbies didn't suit me either. When I was able to cut I was able to function better, my problems sort of dissipated for awhile. (Until the next time I hurt myself that is.)

When I was seventeen I lost my virginity to a guy from another high school. I'd met him over the summer through a cousin & we talked on the phone for awhile before going out. I think it was on the sixth or seventh date when we slept together. I wanted very badly to keep the lights off because I didn't want him to see the faint white scars on my arms. I believe at the time I had no new fresh cuts because things were better for me & I cut less. He did notice the scars though. He asked me about it afterwards & I didn't tell him anything but he was able to guess. It's kind of obvious when you have *that* many scars that there was no accident to cause them. He didn't call me again.

About two weeks later I realized that it was probably because of my cutting that he didn't talk to me anymore. Immediately I ran to the kitchen & opened the

refrigerator. Down, down, down went cookies, ham, cold chicken, warm chicken, & chips from the pantry. Fifteen minutes later I was in the bathroom hovering over the toilet making it all come back up again. I still didn't feel better. I was pissed off at myself for creating such a monster. My logic told me that I needed to cut to cure the fury. I rolled up my sleeves & leaned over the sink with a razor poised in my right hand. Tears were flooding my face at this point & I already felt weak from vomiting. I started cutting at my arms; first I made a small vertical line on my forearm. As the thin silver blade ran across the skin it was chased by a deep red line that I let run down my arm, over my wrist, then my fingers, until it formed small drops at the fingertips. It paused, as if the blood wasn't sure it wanted to leave my body, & then it landed against the white porcelain of the sink. Salvation.

On this particular day I cut too deeply though & as a result passed out. My sister found me lying on the floor in a pool of blood. She thought I'd tried to kill myself & called my father home from work. I was rushed to the hospital where I ended up staying for five days. It was one of the worst five day periods of my life. I had no access to anything sharp because they knew I'd just cut myself. Being in the hospital was a humiliating experience for me & most of the time I sat around trying to think of things I could use to injure myself. It always went back to fingernails. While the wounds weren't as deep or clean it got the job done.

When I was released I went back home to a prison of sorts. I was treated like a porcelain doll, as though I'd break at any moment if someone said anything to me. All my sharp things were taken away from me. I resorted to stealing paperclips & staples from teachers at school. I'd soak them in rubbing alcohol first though. I was sick but not *that* sick.

Six months later it was discovered that I had an eating disorder when once again my sister found me on the bathroom door after I started puking up blood during a purge. My poor sister, she seems to always find me like that. At least she's never found me dead. I was in the hospital again. I was placed on medication for things I didn't even know I had. They thought I had post-traumatic stress disorder after finding my mother, among other conditions. I think being heavily medicated for a few months made the urge to cut fade somewhat. Notice I said, "somewhat."

And this is something I've been doing for years. I don't do it everyday, but I will admit that a few times a week I get the urge to cut and I can't always resist it.

[help! there's blood coming out of my...]

If you're a girl you probably remember when getting your period became a big deal among your friends. This happened for me when I was in the fifth grade. I'd read about getting a period in some of those young adult type books that I was always reading but my mom had never really sat me down & discussed it with me. So I suppose everything I knew about the rag (a term which I rarely use because it makes me cringe) I "picked up off the streets."

My friend Kim got her period first. She was the first girl in our class who had one & for some reason it was a big deal. Suddenly she seemed more grown-up, less like a 10 year old even though nothing about her really changed. She got to carry a purse & take extra trips to the bathroom. When you're a kid these sorts of things are majorly cool.

Much like a character in a Judy Blume book I'd pray to God at night that I'd get my period too. If only I'd known then what I know now I would've prayed in the totally opposite direction. But pray I did, & the period still didn't come.

One Friday afternoon at school (I know it was Friday because I was going to stay over at Kim's house that night) I went to the bathroom & noticed something in my underwear that shouldn't have been there. Not prone to accidents I thought to myself, "This must be my period." The blood looked less red, like it'd been there for a little while at least. Luckily it hadn't come through on my clothes. Kim was the first person I went to, of course. It was late in the school day when I made "the discovery" so I was alright until we got back to her house. Her mom was the second person to know. She was pretty happy about it, as most mothers tend to get very mushy when they hear that a little girl has "become a woman." (Even though I was far from being a woman at 10 years old.)

My mother & I have never really talked about anything, & that's something that plagues our relationship to this day. So when I talked to her on the phone I told her that "there was something red in my pants Friday at school." She of course tried to get me to say the word "period" but I wouldn't. (Me, sheepish? Imagine that.) So when she picked me up she had with her pads that were handed to me without any instructions except that I was to use the wrappers to put used pads in to put in the trashcan.

Pads are the absolute devil. They're bulky & uncomfortable & my mom always bought me the largest ones possible. I became self-conscious about people somehow being able to see that I was wearing a pad through my clothes. I was already very self-conscious as a child anyway, this just added to the anxiety. Tampons were out of the question. I'm not sure if it was because of the fear of Toxic Shock Syndrome or the fact that my mom felt tampons might interfere with virginity, but they were extremely off limits.

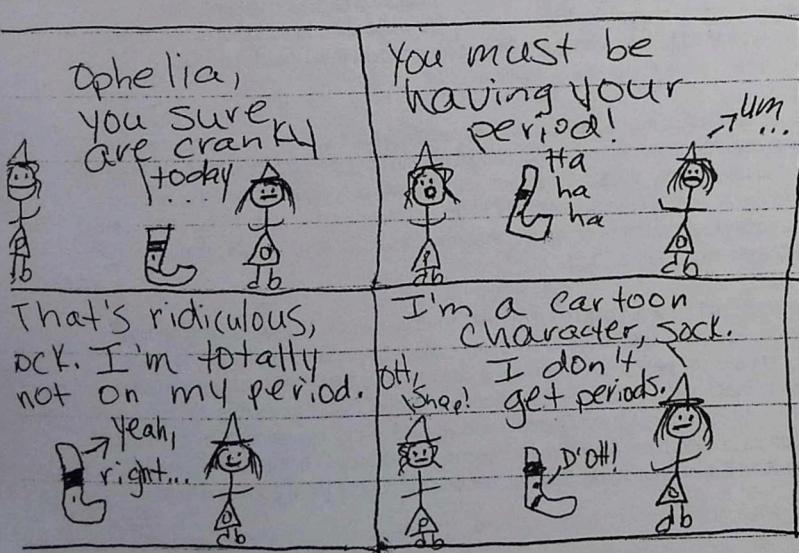
Periods were very difficult for me. I bled a lot & I had horrible cramps. Making frequent trips to the bathroom to change the diaper-esque entity in my panties became a pain in the ass. I was no longer happy to have my period but now that I'd become a woman I had to stay a woman. There was one day that I had a period-related episode at school that I'll never forget. The details are fresh in my memory as if they'd happened yesterday. I was wearing a pair of shorts that had color panels in pink, blue, & yellow. I somehow ended up with a little spot of blood on the yellow panel. And it was on that day that the teacher, Ms. Cocke [heh] asked me to go

wrote something on the board. I just sat there for a minute or so & finally she figured out that something was not right, so I got out of going to the board in front of my whole class with the telltale sign of my menstruation in plain view like a badge of some sort. Of course I did have to get out of my seat at some point. One of my classmates made a remark to me after school as we waited for our rides to pick us up. I told him that my nose had started bleeding, I wiped my hand on my nose, & then my shorts. He didn't believe me.

I discovered Depo-Provera when I was in college. The selling points to an injection over birth control pills were that I only had to have a shot once every three months & that I might not have a period while taking the shots. After years of having to plan my wardrobe so that I could wear dark colored pants certain days of the month & the horror that was pms, I welcomed the chance to say good-bye to blood coming out of my vagina. It worked too. For three or four years I didn't have to buy tampons or worry about wearing light colored dresses. It was beautiful...for a while. The shots had some really awful side effects that didn't make it all worthwhile in the end. I gained 40 pounds the first year & totally lost my sex drive. I suppose that's one way depo works, it makes you not want the sex.

So after all that I ended up having periods again when I went off the shots. I take a pill now that helps with the cramps but in the place of those horrible pains up and down my thighs I have a splitting headache the day before Aunt Flow comes. I guess that's like a warning sign for me though so that I'm sure to have clean black pants.

udence and Ophelia



Scars

Throughout the course of my 27 years I have managed to accidentally decorate my body through various dings, falls, & abrasions, as most of us have. Especially those like me who at times lack the grace and caution that prevent us from doing things like falling over our own feet.

- Chin: Small scar from the "infamous ice skate tying incident."
- Left forearm & elbow: Two separate stitch marks from the time I chased my brother through my grandma's house because I wanted his Monchichi doll & my arm crashed through the storm window. My grandpa opened up the wound to see how deep it was before I went to the hospital. I'll never forget the inside of my arm.
- Left wrist: Years ago there was a situation with an industrial size box of clear wrap. It was a small but gushy wound. No food was bled upon in the creation of this memory. At least not that I remember. [muahahaha]
- Right boob, various places on my arms & legs: My cats don't like to be held sometimes. Heh. The boob scars (three that have almost completely faded after a few months) came from one instance when the cat's back foot caught me as he was jumping away. Tore the shirt & all.
- Left knee: At some point before 1984 I was crawling on the floor and my knee got caught on the threshold between the carpet floors. I haven't been able to crawl across a threshold since.

And the not so accidental scarring...

- Ears: small scars on the helix & tragus parts of both ears from retired piercings.
- Future scars that I'm anticipating: More than likely everything in my face will leave a mark once I remove it permanently. I don't even care though. And when I say, "everything" I mean jewelry obviously.

And then of course there are emotional scars but that's something completely different.

ragged. punctuation is a bother (don't take this to mean i've started my

punctuation

no.

periods are such

a bother

heavy

like annoying

or too light

for a maximum strength tampon

its so

overrated

to give sacrifices

breathe life into something

and say "not today-

/its a break in my normal cycle/

-i have my period and i can't come out to play"

punctuation is

the death of me

period.

i'd rather have been visited by the

semicolon

or a backslash

i've made such good friends with the

exlcamtion ! mark

& she is so beautiful

i want to make her a *

quit bleeding please

you are so irritating that i want to

close parenthesis

and make the

end all

period.

it pains me to cramp my style

What would happen, for instance, if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate and women could not?

The answer is clear - menstruation would become an enviable, boastworthy, masculine event....

Street guys would brag ("I'm a three-pad man") or answer praise from a buddy ("Man, you lookin' good!") by giving five's and saying, "Yeah, man, I'm on the rag!" ...

TV shows would treat the subject at length. ("Happy Days": Ritchie and Potsie try to convince Fonzie that he is still "The Fonz," though he has missed two periods in a row.) So would newspapers. (SHARK SCARE THREATENS MENSTRUATING MEN. JUDGE CITES MONTHLY STRESS IN PARDONING RAPIST.) And movies. (Newman and Redford in "Blood Brothers"!...)

And how would women be trained to react? One can imagine right-wing women agreeing to all those arguments with a staunch and smiling masochism. ("The ERA would force housewives to wound themselves every month": Phyllis Schlafly. "Your husband's blood is as sacred as that of Jesus--and so sexy, too!": Marabel Morgan.) Reformers and Queen Bees would adjust their lives to the cycle of the men around them. Feminists would explain endlessly that men, too, needed to be liberated from the false idea of Martian aggressiveness, just as women needed to escape the bonds of "menses-envy." Radical feminists would add that the oppression of the nonmenstrual was the pattern for all other oppressions. ("Vampires were our first freedom fighters!") Cultural feminists would exalt a bloodless female imagery in art and literature. Socialist feminists would insist that, once capitalism and imperialism were overthrown, women would menstruate, too. ("If women aren't yet menstruating in Russia," they would explain, "it's only because true socialism can't exist within capitalist encirclement.")

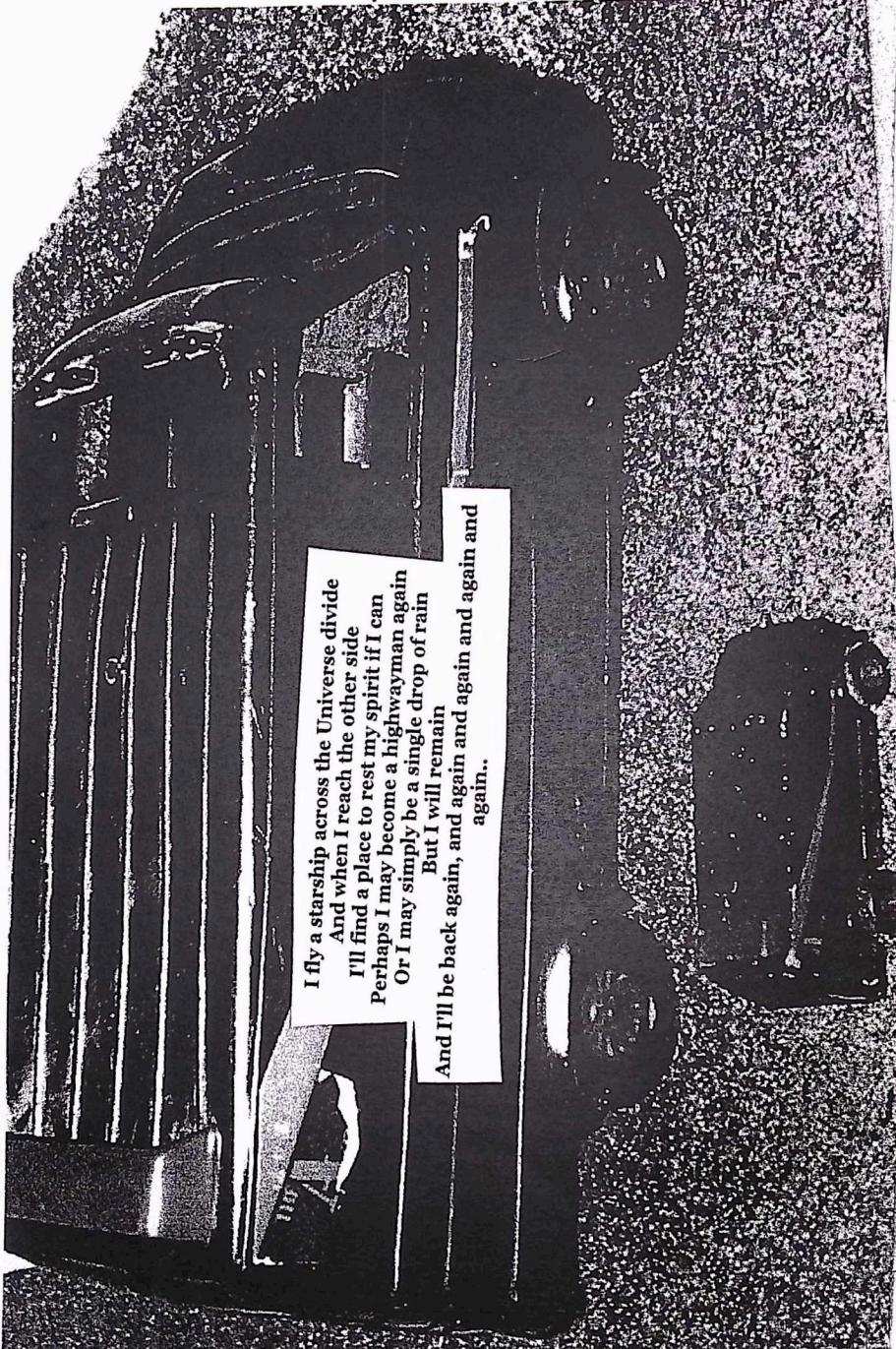
In short, we would discover, as we should already have guessed, that logic is in the eye of the logician. (For instance, here's an idea for theorists and logicians: If women are supposed to be less rational and more emotional at the beginning of our menstrual cycle when the female hormone is at its lowest level, then why isn't it logical to say that, in those few days, women behave the most like the way men behave all month long? I leave further improvisations up to you.)

The truth is that, if men could menstruate, the power justifications would go on and on.

If we let them.

[taken from *If Men Could Menstruate* by Gloria Steinem in *Ms.* VII, October 1978

From: "Highwaymen"



I fly a starship across the Universe divide
And when I reach the other side
I'll find a place to rest my spirit if I can
Perhaps I may become a highwayman again
Or I may simply be a single drop of rain
But I will remain
And I'll be back again, and again and again and
again..